

# CHERRIES

They Saved Her  
From Herself

By CLARISSA MACKIE

In April Miss Alberta Ely looked at the snowy bloom of her big cherry tree and sighed anxiously.

"It looks as if there was going to be a sight of fruit this year if the pesky birds don't eat 'em all up," she said to herself. Then aloud she suddenly shrieked, "Here, you, boy; don't you dare touch them blossoms!"

"I was only picking a few flowers, ma'am," he apologized. "I wanted them for my mamma."

"Those are not flowers," returned Miss Alberta severely. "Those would have been cherries in July if you had left them alone. One, two, three—nine cherries you've picked off my tree, young man."

The boy looked from her lined and careworn face to the fragrant snow of blossoms over his head. "There's plenty more flowers, ma'am," he said wistfully, extending the crushed twigs he held, "but I suppose you better take these. They're yours."

Miss Alberta snatched the blossoms from his hand and tossed them toward a little mound of wilted dandelion roots she had been digging out of the turf. "Hasn't your mother taught you it's wicked to steal?" she demanded.

The boy winced, but he squared his shoulders and answered sturdily: "Of course she's told me that, ma'am. It's me—myself—that did it. She wouldn't prove me doing it."

"Well, I should hope not," ejaculated Alberta, with a fleeting glance toward the roof of the little brown house next door. "When did you move in, boy?"

"Yesterday," he answered, "and my mamma's duffle tied today."

"What is your name?"

"Duncan Farley Bartlett. That's my papa's name too."

April passed into May—May into June—and then came July, sultry and hot, with the rich odor of overripe fruits in Alberta's shrubby garden. Faster than she could convert the berries into cans of amber and ruby tinted preserves they ripened on the bushes, and pirate robins swooped to snatch tidbits for the gaping mouths that crowded the nests.

"Scat!" Alberta would cry, waving her gingham apron at the feathered robbers.

"Oh, twee—wée—wéecece!" the robins would answer saucily as they dashed away, only to return later and repeat the foray.

"Drat 'em!" and Alberta would whisk indoors to rescue the scorching sugar from the fire.

"If the cherries had only waited a little longer!" she groaned one hot day as she looked from the kitchen window into the branches of the cherry tree, where the rich red fruit hung in thick clusters. "If I can only get this current fell off my hands!"

"Do you want a boy to pick cherries?" asked Duncan Bartlett from the doorway, where he stood hat in hand. "My mamma says I can pick on shares if you want me to and I'm careful not to fall."

Alberta looked at him suspiciously. He was seven years old and small for his age, but he was strong and wiry and had an open, chubby countenance that made him look still younger. He wore a clean suit of overalls, and his brown feet were bare.

"I don't like to have my fruit picked on shares," she said sharply, "but I'll tell you what you can try. You can pick 'em on quarter shares. Out of every four quarts you can have one for yourself."

"All right, ma'am," he said, with some disappointment in his tone. "If you'll give me a pall and a rope I'll begin now."

Alberta provided a pall and a rope and a long ladder and watched the small cherry picker carefully climb the rounds until he disappeared among the green branches.

Just before noon Duncan appeared at the door staggering under a pall of luscious cherries. Perspiration streamed down his sunburned nose and cherries stained his lips.

"How many you got there—eight quarts? Well, you get two quarts out of that," Alberta measured a scant two quarts from the brimming pall and dumped them in a paper bag. "You coming back after dinner?"

"If you want me to."

"Come along. Somebody's got to pick 'em. Well, I declare, you've been eating some!" She pointed an accusing finger at his reddened lips.

Duncan flushed proudly. "I only ate some the birds had pecked," he confessed.

"He's gritty," she murmured as she emptied the cherries into a basket and set the pall outside the door.

By 6 o'clock Duncan had picked fifty quarts of cherries, and Alberta reluctantly parted from twelve quarts.

It was after supper that Ellen Snively's face appeared at Alberta's kitchen door. "You all through your supper?" she asked as she stepped within and pushed the sunbonnet back from her sharp face.

"Yes. Sit down." Alberta pushed the Boston rocker forward and hung her dish towel on the line at the back door. "Um dead beat. Been canning fruit all day and got my cherries to do tomorrow." She sank breathlessly into a chair.

"That Bartlett boy's making a good thing out of you," remarked Ellen complacently. "I bought twelve quarts of cherries from him, and the little rascal charged me 15 cents a quart for 'em."

"Fifteen cents a quart!" echoed Alberta in dismay. "They told me down to the store they'd take all I could spare for 8 cents. That boy must have made \$1.80 off my tree. That's man's wages." Alberta was becoming excited.

"Miss Green only paid 2 cents a quart to have hers picked," said Mrs. Snively significantly, "and she sold 'em for 15, making 13 cents a quart. I thought it was too bad he should be making all the money off you, and so I ran in to tell you. I got to run along and get ready for prayer meeting now. You coming?"

"By and by," groaned Alberta wearily. "I got to think this cherry business out first. I feel's if that boy had cheated me. I've a good mind to go over there and make him give me some of that money back. I didn't know that cherries was selling so high or I wouldn't have let him pick on shares."

"Even shares?" demanded Ellen Snively.

"Quarter shares. And that's enough."

"Plenty enough," agreed Ellen.

"I don't know as I can get down to meeting, Ellen, but you might as well take along my contribution to that missionary vacation fund. I promised \$5," said Alberta with conscious generosity. She brought the money and placed it in a small envelope. "I expect it's hard work for them missionaries to convert the heathen to the Golden Rule," she sighed.

"Hiram says he should think the heathen would want a vacation instead of the missionaries," giggled Ellen Snively frivolously as she pocketed the money.

"I'm sorry Hiram ain't a professing Christian—it's a great comfort," observed Miss Ely primly as Ellen disappeared around the corner of the house.

Half an hour later she returned from a trip to the little brown house. She had recovered 80 cents of Duncan's money and had amended her bargain by paying him 2 cents a quart for the cherries he had picked and thus reduced his earnings to \$1. She felt very uncomfortable over the matter also, for once inside the modest brown cottage she found herself in refined surroundings. Mrs. Bartlett was a charming woman and had introduced her husband, Dr. Bartlett, a whole souled, genial man, who inwardly chuckled at his little son's business venture, but outwardly treated it with great seriousness and consideration, much to Duncan's comfort.

Alberta Ely surmised that her new neighbors were far from being in straitened circumstances and had merely sought the little cottage for a summer's recreation in the valley. Their simple courtesy put Alberta's niggardly errand to shame, and her cheeks flushed hotly as she tossed the money down on her kitchen table. "I wish Ellen Snively had stayed at home," she said impatiently. "I've got to get all that fruit down cellar, and it's dark now."

She lighted a lamp and set it down in the cellar; then while the darkness closed in and the air grew more hot and sultry every moment she toiled up and down the stairs, carrying basket after basket of the canned fruit she had worked so hard to preserve. At last she carried the basket of cherries, and halfway down the steep stairs she stepped on her skirt, tottered and then, overbalanced by the basket of fruit, she fell down the remaining steps, twisting her ankle badly as she did so.

For many dreadful moments Alberta Ely lay there on her cellar floor unable to move her foot. Pangs of exquisite pain stabbed her ankle to be succeeded by hot burnings. She felt it swelling within her shoe, and at last she extricated herself from the mass of crushed cherries and assumed a sitting posture, but it was impossible to move farther.

Thunder roared and shook the house to its foundations. The fermenting jars of 1907 cherries yielded to the heat and exploded with astounding reports. At last there came a hissing, sizzling flash of white light outside the cellar windows, followed by a deafening crash, succeeded by another crash of splintering glass. Alberta Ely fainted from pain and fright.

When she regained consciousness she was in her own sitting room, surrounded by the entire Bartlett family. The doctor had skillfully bound her injured ankle, and his wife was holding wet cloths to Alberta's brow, while Duncan pressed strong smelling salts to her thin nose.

"Your preserve shelves came down last night, and it looks as though you'd lost all your fruit," explained Mrs. Bartlett after awhile. "I'm afraid that's not the worst of it, Miss Ely. The lightning struck your cherry tree and split it in two halves. We saw it and came over. We were afraid the bolt might have entered the house."

Alberta Ely looked through tear filled eyes at the three who were so cheerfully ministering to her in spite of her meanness regarding the cherries Duncan had picked. Something hard loosened from about her heart, and it must have been the covering of stinginess, for it never appeared again. She reached out and caught Duncan's chubby hand and kissed it with trembling lips, and the Bartletts understood they had made a new friend and smiled at each other.

None of them heard Alberta Ely whispering to herself. "No missionary ought to take a vacation so long as Ellen Snively and me can get so much Christian," she thought bitterly. "Why, God just had to send a bolt of lightning to that cherry tree to make me understand some things."

# A STRANGE MATCH

With a Singular  
Result

By JULIUS WILSON

John Dexter and I were schoolmates, chums in college and always intimate friends. John, who inherited a fortune, went abroad for awhile after graduating, and I went into the law. As soon as I was ready for business John turned over to me the care of his estate.

John was in every sense a bachelor. He was devoted to bachelor life and showed no disposition to become a husband.

"What—the myself up to a woman?" he would say. "Do you realize what that means? Slavery—absolute slavery. And, more, you are mixed up with another family that you have no interest in whatever. The first time you meet them—after your marriage—they call you by your first name, and you are expected to do the same by them, a familiarity that doesn't exist between you and some of your life-long friends. How can a man endure to be caged with one woman and no way of getting away from her? There's nine chances in ten against his ever having any comfort after he's been chained."

Then he quoted some doggerel on the subject:

"There's many a man when the key has been turned  
In the weak lock for which he has ardently yearned  
Would give all the wealth in his bank  
And his pocket besides, for a key to unlock it."

Now, this aversion to matrimony on John's part was unfortunate. I happened to have a client, a young lady, Margaret Storms, whose property was very much tangled up with the estate of John Dexter, and I could see no such advantageous way of straightening it out except by their uniting their interests in marriage. There was a double reason why this was extremely difficult. Miss Storms was or pretended to be as adverse to marriage as Dexter. But I have never had any faith in this antagonism between the sexes except in special cases, and in this case the two had never seen each other.

I resolved to beard the lion and the lioness in their respective dens and make one supreme effort to unite them and their estates.

Woman, notwithstanding her bitterness when prejudiced, may be more easily handled in a matrimonial matter than man. She naturally seeks her sphere—the home and children—earlier than man. I therefore resolved to begin my attack on Miss Storms. I went to see her and opened up the object of my visit by telling her of the difficulties in the way of making her estate pay the income it should because of the antagonistic interests in the property of another person. Then I went on to say that \$20,000 a year income might be more desirable with a husband than nothing a year without one. "Not in my case," was her quick reply. "I am satisfied that I couldn't be tied up with any man for a month without hating him."

This was not encouraging, but I pursued the argument, while she, though she said nothing, sniffed the air like a war horse bearing the boom of distant cannon. When I came to a pause she asked the name of the man I proposed she should wed. I told her, and her ire burst forth.

"Oh, yes. I know all about him. He's the man who hates women so and goes about spouting those satirical lines he has either composed—though I don't believe he's smart enough—or borrowed."

And she spouted the rimes John had given me on the subject of marriage. "You go back," she continued, "and give him this answer to his borrowed doggerel:

"There's many a girl when embarked on the wave  
Of life's ocean with him who has sworn  
He'll be her slave  
Will find to her cost when nothing can save her  
That the captain's a brute and the vessel's a slaver."

"That's unfortunate," I said. "John's very unwise to be getting off such stuff. But he doesn't mean it any more than you mean your rimes. Nevertheless I expect I had better stick to the law without trying to do outside work. But if your estate eventually passes into the hands of this man Dexter don't blame me."

"Oh, bring him along. I'm not afraid of him. If he bites me I can stick a pin in him."

I said nothing to Dexter about my unfortunate opening of the subject of his marriage, but when I saw him again I told him that the probabilities were his estate would soon be absorbed by that of Miss Storms. Had it not been for this card that I played to both of the parties concerned I might have waited till they were both in their dotage before producing any perceptible effect. When I had just it with Miss Storms she had said, "Oh, bring him along." When I used it with Dexter he asked, "What kind of a looking thing is she?"

"Very pretty," I replied, "and remarkably bright."

"H'm! Heaven save me from a smart woman!"

By dint of hammering it into each of

them that the other would eventually get both estates I finally got them to consider a union. John was willing to meet Margaret and look her over. Margaret, when I took her up on her invitation to "bring him along," backed out, saying that she didn't propose to be trotted out like a horse for sale. But she failed to suggest any other method, and I began to think the matter was entirely off when she made the following remarkable proposition:

"Since you think I must either lose my fortune or marry this woman I will marry him. But I won't live with him. Will that serve the purpose?"

"It would help matters, and you might learn to love him."

"Love him? Nonsense!"

"Well, I'll send him to call on you."

"I don't wish to meet him."

"Then how will you marry him—by proxy?"

"On the day appointed for the wedding bring him here a few minutes before the ceremony. I will come downstairs, and the service must begin as soon as I enter the room. When it is concluded let him go at once. I don't wish to have a word with him."

"Phew! Talk about woman haters! Man haters are a hundredfold worse. However, a marriage, even like this, will straighten out some legal points of great importance in these estates, and when you have met Dexter, who, I have often told you, is a bang up good fellow, you may relent. One thing I fear—if you treat your husband as your propose he will never consent to meet you after the marriage."

"H'm! I haven't said I would consent to meet him, have I?"

Having accomplished in a measure what I had set out to do, I felt very much like backing out and telling both the parties that after all such a union as the lady proposed would be of no great advantage to their interests and would only chain together two persons who would consider their bonds a burden. But, with a distaste for marriage on the part of both, what difference could such a wedlock make since neither wished to marry any one at all? They would be married under the law, which would mean nothing except in their property affairs. On the whole, I decided to let the matter go on and take the consequences, whatever they might be.

The marriage ceremony occurred at 12 o'clock noon. I reached the house with Dexter, who leaned on me for moral support in what he called the most dreadful moment of his life, at five minutes of 12. He wore an ordinary business suit, but if he had been dressed in a carter's suit the gentleman—to the manner born—would have been none the less apparent.

When the clocks began to strike 12 a door opened, and Margaret, becomingly dressed, but not in bridal costume, entered. I saw the two glances at each other, a little pale, but after the first slight a natural color came into the cheeks of both. During the service they made the responses in a reasonably clear and firm tone. When they were required to join hands I saw a slight flush come over John's face. I wondered if it came from the human current coursing through their arms or if Margaret had by the slightest possible pressure conveyed something to him.

There were no congratulations, the bride leaving the room as soon as the ceremony had been finished. The bride's mother advanced to John and engaged him in conversation. I had promised him that as soon as the ceremony was over I would go with him to his club and join him in something to steady his nerves. But Mrs. Storms seemed to be making it difficult for him to get away, so I passed out, saying to him as I did so:

"You will find me at the club."

I went to the club and waited for him an hour. He did not put in an appearance. Having at my office matters needing my attention, I went there and began an afternoon's work, expecting the while to see John come in. He didn't come. At 5 o'clock I returned to the club, asked if he had been there and learned that he had not.

I had promised to dine with him, he assuring me that if I failed him in his extremity it would be a cause of war between us. Nevertheless the dinner hour came and passed and no John. Nor did he appear during the evening.

John did not turn up for a month, at the end of which time he telephoned me to dine with him and his wife the same evening at her home. I gasped for breath. Did I hear aright? Had I gone daft?

"W-h-a-t?" I asked.

"Seven o'clock."

"Where?"

"At Mrs. Storms'. We haven't got any other place to live yet. You know, none was provided."

"Oh!"

Apparently John didn't wish to go into explanation, for I heard a click and knew that the receiver had been hung up.

At the appointed hour I appeared at Mrs. Storms' and found my chum and his wife living together like two turtle-doves.

"By Jove, Billy," said John, "it's fine! Go get married right off."

No explanation was ever given of what occurred after I left John to follow me to the club. That is a part of the story that must be left out, but I have always believed that when the couple joined hands during the wedding ceremony a very important communication passed from the bride by means of a very small pressure of the hand. I have further believed that when she left the room a look instructed her mother to retain the newly made husband. The rest is a sealed book.

I am much relieved as to my part in the match, for the couple are devoted to each other.

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